

REMARKS

Claims 1-32 are pending in the present application. Claims 1, 15, 22 and 28 are the pending independent claims.

Claims 1-32 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over various combinations of references, each combination including U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2002/0018261 (hereinafter "Takeguchi").

In this response, Applicants respectfully traverse the §103(a) rejections.

The present application was filed on March 4, 1999. The Takeguchi reference was filed on June 21, 2001, and claims priority to a PCT application filed October 26, 2000. That PCT application apparently has a priority date of October 28, 1999. Accordingly, it is believed that the Takeguchi reference is not prior art relative to the present application. The §103(a) rejections are therefore improper and should be withdrawn.

In view of the above, Applicants believe that claims 1-32 are in condition for allowance.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph B. Ryan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joseph" being more prominent and the last name "Ryan" following in a similar style.

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